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ABSTRACT

Individuals interacting with an unfamiliar target person behave according to prior impressions of the target. A perceiver's pre-interaction expectancy can mediate both his and the target person's behavior, resulting in behavioral confirmation or compensation. Male subjects (N=96) participated in dyadic interactions in which one subject (perceiver) received pre-interaction information (friendly, unfriendly or no information) about the other (target). Results confirmed predictions that behavioral confirmation, characterized by high levels of interaction and mutual liking, would occur in the friendly expectancy condition; and behavioral compensation would occur in the unfriendly expectancy condition. Although behavioral compensation superficially resembled confirmation, compensating perceivers mistrusted the targets' behavior, liked targets less, and continued to regard them as unfriendly. Major implications are: (1) real-life interactions are shaped by pre-interaction expectancies; (2) findings on behavioral confirmation are tied to behavioral compensation found by Bond (1972); and (3) although behavioral confirmation may result from prior information, behavioral compensation may explain why one's perceptions of a target persist regardless of whether the target's behavior confirms or disconfirms them. (NRB)

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Behavioral Confirmation and Behavioral Compensation

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When interacting with a target person who is relatively unfamiliar, individuals appear to govern their behavior along lines indicated by their prior impression of the target. In a classic demonstration of the influence of such expectancies on social interaction, Kelley (1950) found that subjects who had been led to believe that their guest instructor was "a rather cold person" not only rated the instructor as colder and more distant but also initiated less discussion with him than other students who had been led to believe that he was "a rather warm person."

Other theorists and researchers have proposed that pre-interaction expectancies can give rise to even more complicated effects in that they can influence not only the perceiver's interaction behavior but the target's behavior as well. This more subtle, interaction-based influence has been called the "self-fulfilling prophecy" by Merton (1948; 1957) and Rosenthal (1966; 1974; Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968) and has been called the "behavioral confirmation" process by Mark Snyder and his colleagues (Snyder, Tanke, & Berscheid, 1977; Snyder & Swann, 1978). The process can be characterized by a sequence of events in which the perceiver (1) acquires or invokes a pre-interaction expectancy regarding the target; (2) acts toward the target in a manner determined by this expectancy; and (3) thereby elicits from the target a pattern of reciprocated behavior that apparently confirms the validity of the expectancy. As Snyder et al. point out, the perceiver who influences the target's behavior in this manner is typically unaware

of the causal role that his own behavior ... plays in generating the behavioral evidence that erroneously confirms his expectations. Unbeknownst to the perceiver, the reality that he confidently perceives to exist in the social world has, in fact, been actively constructed by his own transactions with and operations upon the social world" (Snyder et al., 1977, p. 658).

A number of studies have provided impressive evidence documenting the hypothesized operation of the self-fulfilling prophecy/behavioral confirmation process (e.g., Jones & Panitch, 1971; Kelly & Stahelski, 1970; Seaver, 1973; Snyder et al., 1977; Snyder & Swann, 1978; Taylor, 1979). However, it may be asked whether this is the only process whereby a perceiver's pre-interaction expectancy may influence his own and a target's interaction behavior. Although theorists have given relatively little attention to possible alternative processes, one such alternative is suggested by the results of a study by Bond (1972). In contrast to the behavioral confirmation effect which he had anticipated, Bond found that subjects who were forewarned that their interactant was a "cold" person acted more warmly in her presence than subjects who were given a "warm" impression set; more importantly, they induced the target person to act more warmly in return. These findings suggest that Bond's "cold" set subjects did not initiate a process of behavioral confirmation by displaying behaviors which, when reciprocated by the target, would appear to confirm the perceivers' prior impression of the target. Instead, they appeared to initiate a process of behavioral compensation by displaying behaviors which, when reciprocated by the target, would ideally avert or at least minimize the unpleasantness the perceiver anticipated in interacting

with the target.

Bond's data suggest that behavioral confirmation and behavioral compensation are similar in that both provide a means whereby a perceiver's pre-interaction expectancy can mediate both his own and the target's behavior. What then, are the essential differences between these processes? In general, it would appear that behavioral confirmation is likely to occur when the perceiver is inclined to accept as a "given" and thus reciprocate the specific pattern of behavior anticipated from the target. In contrast, behavioral compensation is likely to occur when the perceiver is motivated to alter the target's anticipated behavior by displaying a contrasting pattern of behavior that the target is intended to reciprocate. This difference between the passive, accepting orientation of the confirming perceiver and the active, controlling orientation of the compensating perceiver suggests that whereas the first individual may indeed remain relatively unaware of the influence of his own behavior on the target's, the second individual may be highly aware of this influence.

This reasoning suggests that the more passive, accepting orientation of the confirming perceiver would predispose him to make the fundamental attribution error (e.g., Heider, 1958; Jones & Nisbett, 1971; Ross, 1977) and assume that the target's reciprocated behavior was dispositionally determined. On the other hand, the compensating perceiver's more active awareness of the situational determinants of the target's behavior should lead him to doubt that it reflects the target's "true" disposition at all. By discounting the possible dispositional cause of the target's behavior because of an increased awareness of the influence that

his own behavior has exerted on the target's, the compensating perceiver may still accept his pre-interaction impression as valid even though the target's behavior appears to contradict it. If this reasoning is correct, it indicates that the cognitive outcomes of the confirmation and compensation processes may paradoxically be similar, despite the marked differences in the perceivers' behavioral orientation toward the target. Both the confirming and the compensating perceivers may be able to maintain their initial impression of the target: the confirming perceiver by his readiness to accept the target's "confirming" behavior uncritically and at face value, the compensating perceiver by his readiness to discount the target's "disconfirming" behavior.

Some evidence supporting this reasoning is provided by two experiments which my colleagues and I have conducted (Ickes, Patterson, Rajecki, and Tanford, 1980). Although the data from both studies are supportive, I will talk about only the first of these studies because of the constraints on time.

The subjects in the study were 96 male undergraduates in introductory psychology classes who were recruited individually by telephone and scheduled to participate in pairs. Within each pair, one subject (the perceiver) was randomly designed to receive pre-interaction information about the other subject (the target). Each dyad member was instructed by the scheduler to report to specific waiting areas within the psychology building that were physically isolated from each other. The purpose of separating the subjects was not only to ensure that they would have no opportunity to interact before the experimental session began but also to provide a means for the perceiver to receive pre-interaction information about the target without

the target's awareness.

Arriving at the separate waiting area where the subject designated as the perceiver had been asked to report, the experimenter greeted the perceiver and gave him the expectancy manipulation. In the no expectancy (control condition), she said:

> "Hi, you must be perceiver's name. I just ran into target's name down the hall. He's going to be in the experiment with you today. The scheduler apparently told him to report to room ____ instead of here. Do you happen to know him by any chance?"

These same comments were made to the perceiver in the two experimental conditions--a friendly expectancy condition and an unfriendly expectancy condition--but in these conditions the experimenter continued by saying:

> "Well, he's one of the (friendliest/unfriendliest) people I've talked to lately. (Pause) But I guess you shouldn't tell him I said that. As an experimenter I'm supposed to remain neutral. You won't mention it, will you?"

The experimenter then led both subjects into the experimental room and asked them to take a seat on a couch. She explained that the first part of the study involved filling out copies of a questionnaire but that she had just run out of these and would have to obtain some more. She then left the room, closing the door behind her, and activated a stopwatch to time a five-minute interval in which the subjects were covertly audio- and videotaped.

After the five-minute interaction period, the experimenter returned to debrief the subjects and obtain their written consent to use the videotaped record as data. She then asked each subject to fill out a copy of

a posttest questionnaire designed to elicit various perceptions of self's and other's behavior during the interaction period. These self-report data were subsequently analyzed, along with the data for various measures of both subjects' behavior that were coded from the videotapes by raters who were blind to the subjects' conditions.

It was predicted that a process of behavioral confirmation would occur in the friendly expectancy condition that would be reflected in the behavior of both perceivers and targets. A high level of behavioral involvement and mutual liking was expected to characterize the interactions in this condition relative to those in the no-expectancy control condition. In contrast, it was predicted that a process of behavioral compensation would occur in the unfriendly expectancy condition. Although this process was anticipated to affect the behavior of both perceivers and targets so that it superficially resembled that observed in the friendly expectancy condition, unfriendly expectancy perceivers were nevertheless expected to mistrust their partners' behavior, to express less liking for them, and to continue to regard them as unfriendly.

The overall pattern of results was very consistent with these predictions. The behavioral and self-report data converged to suggest that the creation in one dyad member of a "friendly" pre-interaction expectancy initiated a process of behavioral confirmation, whereas the creation of an "unfriendly" expectancy initiated a process of behavioral compensation. Behavioral confirmation was evidenced by perceivers who had been led to expect friendly targets in that these perceivers not only sat closer to their partners, but also initiated conversation with the targets more frequently than did perceivers in the control condition. In addition,

perceivers and targets in the friendly expectancy condition talked to and looked at each other more, rated each other as more dominant and assertive, and displayed a higher level of interpersonal attraction than their counterparts in the no-expectancy control condition.

On the other hand, perceivers who had been led to expect unfriendly targets did not attempt to remain aloof from them, as the behavioral confirmation hypothesis would predict. Instead, as in Bond's (1972) study, they appeared to adopt a strategy designed to compensate for the targets' expected unfriendliness. Thus, their overt behavior was in many respects quite similar to that displayed by perceivers in the friendly expectancy condition. Relative to their counterparts in the control condition, perceivers in the unfriendly expectancy condition also tended to sit closer to their partners and to talk first. Through the reciprocation of their compensatory behaviors, both they and their partners displayed an atypically high level of smiling early in the interaction and also engaged in more talking and looking than the control dyads.

Although these compensatory, apparently "friendly" behaviors of the unfriendly expectancy perceivers were indeed reciprocated by their partners, perceivers did not appear to change their minds about their partners' friendliness. On the contrary, in their postinteraction ratings of their partners they described them as significantly more insincere, untrustworthy, and unfriendly than did perceivers in the other two conditions. Mutual liking was also significantly lower in this condition than in the other two.

Taken collectively the self-report data were consistent with the behavioral data in suggesting that the friendly expectancy initiated a

process of behavioral confirmation whereas the unfriendly expectancy initiated a process of behavioral compensation. Friendly expectancy perceivers appeared to take their partners' reciprocated behavior at face value; unfriendly perceivers did not. The interactions in the friendly expectancy dyads resulted in a high level of interpersonal attraction; those in the unfriendly expectancy dyads did not. The apparent cynicism of the unfriendly expectancy perceivers can be construed in attributional terms as a tendency to discount the evidence of their own and their partners' behavior as being informative about underlying dispositions (Kelley, 1971). Perceiving their own "friendliness" as a situationally-elicited strategy for dealing with an unfriendly target, they apparently made the corollary inference that the target's "friendliness" was also due more to the situation (i.e., to their own compensatory behavior) than to the target's "true" dispositions.

In more general terms, these findings suggest that interactants are likely to take each other's behavior at face value and view it as "correspondent" (Jones & Davis, 1965; Jones & McGillis, 1976) when their impression management concerns are minimal or are lacking entirely. However, when the participants employ impression management strategies in order to exert control over the course of the interaction, they are likely to become acutely aware that the other's behavior is strongly influenced by various aspects of the situation, including their own behavior, and to doubt its correspondent inference value (Jones & Wortman, 1973).

There are three major implications of this research. First, it demonstrates that the direct and mediated effects of pre-interaction expectancies can occur in the context of naturalistic, spontaneous, face-to-face interactions as well as in the context of non-face-to-face

interactions (e.g., Kelley & Stahelski, 1970; Snyder et al., 1977; Snyder & Swann, 1978) or of interactions whose form and content are prescribed by the experimenter (e.g., Bond. The research thus provides a particularly stringent test of the assertion that real-life interactions, despite all of their idiosyncratic variability and "noise," are nonetheless shaped and guided by the pre-interaction expectancies of the participants. Second, the present study ties the research findings on behavioral confirmation to the behavioral compensation findings obtained by Bond (1972) and directs our attention to the possible attributional aspects of these phenomena (e.g., Jones & Wortman, 1973; Kelly, 1955; Kelley, 1971; Ross, 1977; Snyder et al., 1977). Third, and most important, it indicates that behavioral confirmation is a possible but not inevitable consequence of a perceiver's pre-interaction expectancy. By positing an additional process of behavioral compensation, this research may help to explain that apparent paradox of social perception (what might be termed the "damned if you, damned if you don't" phenomenon) whereby the perceiver's perceptions of a target persist unchanged regardless of whether the target's behavior appears to confirm or disconfirm them.

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